

A Sense of Safety

by Angie McCown, Director
TDCJ Victim Services Division

As we wind down the summer and look toward the fall, I am struck by the mass shootings that have occurred in the last few months. Each of you reading the Victims' Informer have been impacted by violent crime either directly or indirectly, and although a single act of violent crime is devastating to those impacted by it, a mass shooting sends ripples across the world. The media takes us to those scenes, and places us in the midst of the loss, fear, anguish, and horror that the victims, their families, and communities are experiencing. I know that although I was not directly impacted by the shootings in Aurora, Colorado; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; or College Station, Texas; I felt a deep sense of loss for those communities and a heightened sense of awareness regarding my safety and the safety of

my family, friends, and co-workers. Those of us who work in the criminal justice field or who have been a victim of violent crime understand that a random senseless act of violent crime can happen to anyone at anytime; however, it does not mean that we should not seek ways to increase our sense of safety. I was recently introduced to an active shooter awareness video created by the City of Houston Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security that provides important steps individuals can take if they encounter an active shooter. The video is titled, *Run, Hide, Fight: Surviving an Active Shooter Event*, and it can be found on the City of Houston Mayor's website at www.houstontx.gov/mayor or on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/5VcSwejU2D0>. The video depicts a shooter in the work place and offers information

on how to evaluate the situation and consider options that may increase the chance of safety and survival. I hope you will find it to be helpful.

On another note, I mentioned in the last issue of the Victims' Informer that TDCJ Victim Services had planned to dedicate this issue to *Remembering Suzanne McDaniel* and her endless contributions to the Victim Services field. We have decided that it would be more fitting to do this Victims' Informer issue in April during National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

Please submit stories, comments, and/or photos for consideration to tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.state.tx.us or mail copies to the Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse, 8712 Shoal Creek Blvd. Suite 265, Austin, TX 78757.

September 25 is the National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims

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El Paso's Approach to Crime and Its Victims

By Ellic Sahualla

El Paso County District Attorney's Office

My first day as a prosecutor with the El Paso County District Attorney's Office was a whirlwind of new places, new faces, new rules, and new regulations. Yet in the middle of that information overload, one policy was so important that just about everyone I talked to pointed to one of the numerous places where it was written down: "You have to call the victim before you dispose of the case. — Jaime Esparza, January 4, 1993." Our district attorney has made crime victims a focal point for our office for decades. That's just a starting point, of course, and years later, I'm pleased to say that we do so much more than simply keeping victims "in the loop."

Awareness & Engagement

One of the most important things the El Paso County District Attorney's Office has done is to think of the bigger picture beyond any particular victim.

Part of that was simply deciding not to go it alone anymore. Developing partnerships with other organizations within our community has made a tremendous difference in how effectively we empower victims and prosecute offenders.

Law enforcement was an obvious starting point. In recent years we've worked much more closely with the various local, state, and federal agencies in the El Paso area to reach out to our most vulnerable citizens. That includes improving investigative techniques through training, feedback, and on-scene direction—we even have prosecutors regularly ride along with police officers responding to family violence calls to help guide them—as well as an ongoing dialogue between our victim advocacy programs. We've also cultivated a close partnership with officials at Fort Bliss, our Army base, to help keep victims and their families safe and address their unique needs

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within the context of military life. Sharing expertise and information with all of the stakeholders in our community has helped us do more for victims, and do it more effectively.

More broadly, we've worked to make family violence a highly visible issue in our community and enlisted the help of outreach programs, schools, and entities like the Center Against Family Violence to change public perceptions about reporting and prosecuting these crimes. One of our greatest successes has been hosting an annual "Help-Hope-Healing" conference for victims and their families. We bring in celebrity speakers who've endured violence and abuse to talk about their experiences. Attendees are also provided with an array of services, but perhaps the most important resource they're able to tap into is each other. By widely publicizing the event and its results, we help raise awareness and encourage victims to report attacks and prosecute their attackers.

El Paso County District Attorney's Office attorneys and staff members also participate in a "walk across El Paso" to show victims that they aren't alone. The walk ends at the Crime Victims Memorial Wall and Garden, the centerpiece of one of our city's parks, and a monument to lost victims and El Paso's commitment to the families and friends who've survived them. The names of El Paso/Juarez citizens whose lives have been taken by crime are inscribed on the wall and read aloud in a ceremony of remembrance.

Education is another cornerstone of our work for victims. For example, we partnered with the El Paso County Attorney's Office, which prosecutes juvenile offenders, to create a campaign called "¡No te dejes!" or "Don't let yourself!"

The heart of that campaign is a presentation by attorneys from our two offices that's aimed at teenagers who may be exposed to dating violence. It includes a high-production-value video that follows the life of a high school student who gets into an increasingly abusive dating relationship with a classmate. After showing the video, the presenter discusses teen dating violence with the young audience members, providing them with information, answering their questions, and leaving them with a packet of materials that discusses the issues and provides resources they can turn to. Dozens of these presentations have been delivered at schools and other venues all across El Paso, and the reception has been strongly positive.

We've launched similar programs for adult victims (offered in both English and Spanish) that explore the signs and cycle of family violence, safety planning, and services available to undocumented victims, who are particularly vulnerable because they have no legal residency status in the United States. These presentations have been delivered all over El Paso, and like the teen dating violence initiative, we've found that quite apart from the specific information these efforts convey, it's the message they send about violence itself that's had a real impact on attitudes within our jurisdiction. It's not always about what you say; starting the conversation is often enough.

24-hour Contact Initiative

Despite these far-reaching programs, we haven't lost sight of individual victims, whom we serve in a variety of ways. Making sure that we can hold offenders accountable is the first step. Whether it's through on-scene advice or our twenty-four hour case intake

system, El Paso County District Attorney's Office prosecutors are involved from the initial investigation of criminal cases onwards, helping officers ask the sorts of questions and collect the evidence that will allow us to successfully pursue each case in court.

That also gives us the opportunity to do more for victims. Our prosecutors and local law enforcement officers have been trained to be sensitive to a victim's needs, and victims are provided with resources ranging from standby assistance and transportation, to emergency protective orders for when the offender bonds out of jail. We're also uniquely thorough in the way we document everything, such as having officers make digital video recordings of family violence investigations (including recorded statements from victims, witnesses, and even suspects) and gathering extensive information on where a victim is going tonight, where she'll be tomorrow, and who might be able to help us contact her in the future. This gives us an unprecedented kind of evidence for prosecution purposes and a greater ability to make sure that victims remain safe as a case proceeds.

Police investigation is just the first link in our process, though. At the El Paso County District Attorney's Office, we have a team that meets every single day to review family violence cases and act on them as necessary. Before each meeting, our clerks create an initial case file containing all of the evidence available and an up-to-date criminal history on all of the parties involved. We also send out two teams that each consist of a victim advocate and an investigator. They divide cases up and then head out to speak with victims face-to-face within twenty-four hours of the crime.

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These teams find out if each victim is safe and if not, offer to take him/her to a shelter. Our advocates go on to provide the victim with information about the services available, such as the Texas Crime Victims' Compensation Fund and the U-Visa program. The advocates also explain how the criminal justice system works and give the victim some ideas for developing a safety plan. Our investigators then gather additional contact information, including the telephone numbers of family members and close friends, so that later on we have alternative ways of reaching the victim. They also obtain a records release form if the victim received medical treatment, take photographs of any visible injuries that have developed since the police took pictures, and collect any evidence that might have been overlooked or unavailable during the initial investigation.

Once all of that is done, the information is put together into complete case files by our administrative assistants and then we have our meeting. Each case is thoroughly evaluated by a team of prosecutors, investigators, victim advocates, law enforcement liaisons, military personnel, and local mental health providers. We collect a number of important data points as we go, to help us keep track of trends in family violence so that we can remain proactive instead of reactive. After each case is reviewed, a minimum recommendation for any plea agreement is made by the District Attorney himself and physically written into the case file in bold red ink that no one could overlook, which is why these recommendations have come to be known as "red writing" here in El Paso. The red ink began accidentally, but it quickly became instrumental in changing the culture of family violence prosecution in our courthouse. Once a

prosecutor or defense attorney picks up a file and sees the red writing from the District Attorney himself, they know it's a case to be taken seriously.

Our unit includes specialized family violence prosecutors at both the felony and misdemeanor levels who handle their own dockets and serve as a resource to the other eighty or so attorneys in our office who end up with the many family violence cases that we choose not to keep "in house." El Paso is also lucky enough to have two dedicated family violence criminal courts and a civil court that handles nothing but protective order cases. By working together and effectively utilizing all our assets, we've been able to do so much more than just ensure that every victim is contacted throughout the prosecution process; we've been able to achieve greater justice for more victims than ever before.

Results & Future Direction

These efforts have paid off tremendously. The Office of the Governor recently sponsored a study of our program by the Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault at the University of Texas at Austin, School of Social Work. After a detailed review led by Dr. Noël Busch-Armendariz and Dr. Sapaná Donde, including interviews with victims in El Paso, the study drew the following conclusions:

1. Implementation of the 24 Hour Contact program has instituted a noteworthy paradigm shift in El Paso, where family violence is viewed as a serious and prosecutable crime that will not be easily dismissed and for which offenders will be held accountable for their crimes of violence. The program has altered legal practices by criminal justice professionals—including ADAs,

law enforcement, and defense attorneys—and increased skill-building, peer support, and mentorship with the District Attorney's Office. Unfortunately, myths about family violence persist, so efforts to address these myths should continue.

2. The 24 Hour Contact program provides significant emotional support to family violence victims and increases their access to important community and financial resources.

3. Collaborations among key players in the criminal justice system and community victim service providers (e.g., law enforcement, local family violence shelter, probation, and the Battering Intervention and Prevention Program) have been considerably strengthened as a result of the program.

4. The prosecution of family violence has been significantly enhanced through the collection of better evidence, an increase in evidence gathering, improved preparation of case files, and an increase in preparedness and effectiveness of ADAs for trial.

5. Victims and professionals in the criminal justice system reported a range of mixed reactions to the district attorney's stance on victimless prosecution. Some favored having the burden of responsibility placed on ADAs, while a minority of victims expressed frustration with diminished control over decision-making regarding the prosecution of offenders.

The above is from pages eight and nine of the report summarizing the study (which is available at <http://www.utexas.edu/ssw/dl/files/cswr/institutes/idvsa/publications/El-Paso.pdf>). Our hope is that the successful strategies we've employed to aid victims and hold offenders accountable can be used just as effectively throughout Texas.

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We're proud of the difference we're making and always looking for new and better ways to help crime victims. Sometimes, like our work in the community, that means strong partnerships. Other times, like our computers and digital video recorders, that means bet-

ter technology. And often, like our daily home visits and case review meetings, that means more sophisticated organization and institutional approaches. But always, it means keeping victims in mind and putting them first. We don't just contact the victim before we

dispose of a case; we make the victim a priority in every decision we make and action we take. That is our mandate and the challenge we offer up to everyone who cares about making a difference in the lives of Texas victims. ★



Texas Victim Assistance Training Online

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**The Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Victim Services Division and key
Stakeholders are excited to launch the
Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT)
Online!**



An experiential format for learning aimed at new victim services professionals in Texas

Through a grant award from the Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice Division, and assistance from key stakeholders, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Victim Services Division, is now offering web-based training focused on victim-centered service delivery and professional development that complements other victim services initiatives and enables new advocates to acquire baseline professional skills and competence.

Completion of the training will provide victim services professionals with the necessary tools for providing consistent and appropriate services to crime victims, working collaboratively with partner agencies serving victims, and providing a model of professionalism for victim services practitioners who serve our community and enhance our quality of life.

Access anywhere, anytime

CEUs available

Learn at your own pace

No Costs

Start Now

**To register or obtain more information,
visit www.tdcj.state.tx.us/php/tvatonline/**

Certificate issued upon completion

calendar

September 5-6, 2012
Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV)
2012 Statewide Conference: Moving Forward

AT&T Executive Education & Conference Center,
Austin, Texas

<http://www.tcfv.org/trainings-events/event-calendar>

September 19-21, 2012
National Center for Victims of Crime
2012 National Conference

Hilton New Orleans Riverside,
New Orleans, Louisiana

http://ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbID=DB_2012NationalConference207

September 29-October 3, 2012
119th Annual International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Conference: Law Enforcement Education and Technology Exposition

San Diego Convention Center,
San Diego, California

<http://www.theiacpconference.org/iacp2012/public/enter.aspx>

October 10, 2012
Partnership Against Domestic Violence
2012 Conference: Domestic Violence in the Workplace

The Home Depot Corporate Headquarters,
Atlanta, Georgia

<http://padv.org/2012-domestic-violence-in-the-workplace/>

**OUR GOAL IS TO PRINT NEWS OF INTEREST FOR
VICTIMS AND VICTIM ADVOCATES**

The Victim's Informer newsletter is published quarterly. Articles, meeting notices, and requests to receive notice of new issues should be sent to TDCJ Victim Services Division,

October 22-24, 2012
Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas
Annual Conference: Partners in Courage

AT&T Executive Education & Conference Center,
Austin, Texas

<http://www.partnersincourageconference.org>

October 31-November 1, 2012
Vera Institute of Justice, Center on Victimization and Safety
2012 National Conference on Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Against People with Disabilities

Louisville, Kentucky

<http://www.nsvrc.org/calendar/12005>

November 15-18, 2012
Male Survivor
13th International Conference: A World of Healing

John Jay College of Criminal Justice,
New York, New York

http://www.malesurvivor.org/calendar/view_entry.php?id=4365&date=20121115

***October is Domestic Violence
Awareness Month***

Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse, 8712 Shoal Creek Blvd, Suite 265, Austin, Texas 78757-6899; faxed to 512-452-0825; or emailed to: tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.state.tx.us. For questions or comments, please call us at 800-848-4284.

New Agency Announcement!

Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD)



By Jim Hurley

Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD)

Pursuant to Senate Bill 653 passed by the 82nd Texas Legislature and signed by the Governor, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) was created on December 1, 2011. Combining the functions of the former Texas Youth Commission and the Texas Juvenile Probation Department, TJJD was created to provide a unified state juvenile justice agency that works in partnership with local county governments, the courts, and communities to promote public safety by providing ef-

fective supports and services to youth throughout the juvenile justice continuum.

TJJD services focus on safety and security, collaborative partnerships with local juvenile justice professionals, and improving rehabilitation opportunities for Texas' most serious and violent youth offenders to increase their success upon re-entry to their home communities. The department has a vision of providing safety for citizens of the State of Texas through partnership with communities and the delivery of a con-

tinuum of services and programs to help youth enrich and value their lives and the community by focusing on accountability of their actions and planning for a successful future. ★

For more information on TJJD, contact:

Melissa Headrick
Administrator of Sex Offender Registration and Victim Services
(512) 424-6289
melissa.headrick@tjjd.texas.gov
Website: <http://www.tjjd.texas.gov>



Hosting a "Tree of Angels" in Your Community

By Verna Lee Carr

People Against Violent Crime (PAVC)

While it is only just September, Christmas will soon be upon us, making now the perfect time to begin planning a Tree of Angels event in your community.

The Tree of Angels is a meaningful Christmas program specifically held in memory and support of victims of violent crime. The Tree of Angels helps allow your community to recognize that the holiday season is a difficult time for families and friends who have suffered the crushing impact of a violent crime. This special event honors and supports surviving victims and victims' families by making it possible for loved ones to bring an angel ornament to place on a special tree known as a Christmas tree. In December 1991, the first program was implemented by Verna Lee Carr with People Against Violent Crime (PAVC). Over the past 21 years, the Tree of Angels has become a memorable tradition observed in many Texas communities and has served as a source of comfort, hope, support and healing.

The Tree of Angel is a registered trademark of PAVC and we are extremely sensitive to ensuring that the original meaning and purpose of the Tree of Angels continues and is not distorted in any way. For this reason, we ask that if your city or county is interested in receiving a copy of the Tree of Angels How-To Guide, please complete a basic informational form on the Tree of Angels website, <http://treeofangels.org/index.html>. After the form is completed electronically and submitted back to PAVC, you will receive instructions on how to download the How-To Guide. If you have any questions regarding the Tree of Angels or the How-To-Guide, please contact Verna Lee at PAVC (512-837-PAVC) or e-mail vernalee@peopleagainstviolentcrime.org. ★

Texas Identity Theft Network Releases Cutting Edge Curriculum on Mental Health Issues of Identity Theft Victims

By Paula Pierce and Moriah Steinthal

Texas Legal Services Center (TLSC)

True or false: Identity theft causes post-traumatic stress syndrome in some victims.

It is true. A new training curriculum from the Texas Identity Theft Network explores this and other emotional reactions to the fastest growing crime in America. The first training curriculum of its kind, Mental Health Issues of Identity Theft Victims was developed by the Texas Identity Theft Network with the expertise of Trauma Support Services of North Texas and Texas Legal Services Center through funding from the Department of Justice. The five-part curriculum includes an introduction to working with identity theft victims, the emotional impact of identity theft, common reactions to identity theft, strengthening resilience in identity theft victims, screening and referring identity theft victims to professional therapists, and tips for professional therapists serving identity theft victims. The training is appropriate for anyone serving identity theft victims including law enforcement, victim advocates, prosecutors, attorneys, and professional therapists.

Portions of the new curriculum debuted at the annual Texas Victim Services Association conference held in San Antonio

in May. The first full six hour training was held in Dallas on July 27. Additional trainings are being planned in Lubbock and Houston. CEU credit or other accreditations may be available.

The Texas Identity Theft Network typically meets bi-monthly via phone, or in the TLSC Austin office. Current members include representatives from organizations such as U.S. Attorney's Office, TDCJ Victim Services Division, the US Postal Inspection Service, Department of Public Safety, Internal Revenue Service, Secret Service, State and local law enforcement, Universities, and others who deal with victims of identity theft. To learn more about the coalition or for more information on trainings, contact Moriah Steinthal at 512-637-6752 or msteinthal@tlsc.org. ★

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Arlington Police Department: Excellence in Victim Services

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division would like to spotlight the Arlington Police Department for their international recognition for outstanding service to victims of crime. This year, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), along with Login, Inc., selected the Arlington Police Department to receive the 2012 Excellence in Victim Services Award.

The Excellence in Victim Services Award is awarded annually to agencies that demonstrate excellence in providing innovative service to crime victims by successfully integrating current best practices of enhanced victim response into all facets of their organizations. The award is given in each

of three categories: small, medium and large agencies. The Arlington Police Department received the award in the large category, which is determined by the number of sworn officers in their department.

This is a prestigious award as all law enforcement agencies worldwide are eligible to compete, with the exception of private corporations or individuals. The Arlington Police Department has previously been bestowed with the Excellence in Victim Services Award in 2009. ★

**Congratulations to Arlington PD and the
Victim Services Unit!**